

## Spirituality and work engagement among church leaders

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Much research attention has been given to the mental health problems of church leaders, but relatively few studies have investigated positive indicators of clergy mental health at work, such as work engagement. This paper examines spiritual resources and job resources as key antecedents of work engagement. In contrast, job demands were examined as a moderator of the relationship between resources and work engagement. Hypotheses were framed within the motivational process of the Job Demands-Resources model, and tested using data from 1230 church leaders who completed the 2011 National Church Life Survey in Australia. Results of structural equation modelling analyses supported hypothesised positive relationships between resources and work engagement but, contrary to expectations, job demands did not amplify the positive relationship between spiritual resources and work engagement. Findings are discussed in the light of recent empirical studies of church leaders and the conservation of resources theory.

**Keywords:** work engagement; spiritual resources; job resources; job demands; clergy

### Introduction

The mental health of clergy and other church leaders is a concern at both the individual and organisational levels, not least because disorders and syndromes associated with clergy mental health can negatively affect individual and congregational well-being and organisational vitality (Kaldor & Bullpitt, 2001). Given the impact of negative health states, research to date has not unreasonably focused on indicators of compromised mental health among clergy such as clergy burnout (e.g., Francis, Loudon, & Rutledge, 2004; Miner, Sterland, & Dowson, 2009; Whetham & Whetham, 2000). Consequently, relatively little attention has been given to positive indicators of mental health and occupational well-being among clergy. Some studies have examined satisfaction with ministry as a positive counterpart to burnout (e.g., Miner, Dowson, & Sterland, 2010), and these studies provide important information about well-being at the individual level. However, it is also important to study positive health indicators that are directly related to the religious workplace, as these indicators are of particular relevance to religious organisations. One of these indicators, *work engagement*, represents a relatively new focus of the study, but has already been shown to be a positive indicator of occupational well-being in a wide range of organisations (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Demerouti, Bakker, De Jonge, Janssen, & Schaufeli, 2001; Kahn, 1990). As such, work engagement holds promise for

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identifying new ways of understanding clergy health and well-being. This study investigates work engagement among church leaders (clergy and lay leaders) in Australia.

Work engagement is defined as a persistent and positive affective-motivational state in employees characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). People engaged at work have high levels of energy, enthusiastically identify with their jobs, and are typically happily engrossed in work such that time passes quickly. Empirical studies have consistently identified job and personal resources as antecedents of work engagement (see Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Though correlated, job resources (such as performance feedback, autonomy, development opportunities, and social support), and personal resources (such as self-efficacy and optimism), appear to be independent predictors of work engagement (van den Heuvel, Demerouti, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2010; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007, 2009a).

Few empirical studies have examined work engagement among church leaders. One exception is the work of Bickerton (2013) who investigated antecedents and consequences of work engagement in a large sample of Australian religious workers. As hypothesised, job resources and a special group of personal resources were identified as significant predictors of work engagement and reduced turnover intentions. Bickerton's work is framed within a dominant account of occupational stress and well-being, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001).

### ***Job resources as antecedents of work engagement***

According to the JD-R model, job and personal resources initiate a motivational process that stimulates the development of work engagement and subsequent personal and occupational well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job resources are defined as those physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that promote the accomplishment of work goals, reduce job demands and their associated psychological and physiological costs, and stimulate personal growth and development (Demerouti et al., 2001). Job resources are presumed to foster work engagement through intrinsic and/or extrinsic motivational processes.

Intrinsically, job resources motivate engagement through fulfilling basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and belonging (Deci & Ryan, 1985), or through fostering psychological states of meaningfulness, responsibility, and knowledge of outcomes (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Extrinsically, job resources provide practical help or information for accomplishing work goals, and hence, engagement (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). There is substantial evidence from both cross-sectional and longitudinal research supporting the association between job resources and work engagement (for a meta-analysis, see Halbesleben, 2010). In this study, performance feedback was included as a key job resource because it is a core intrinsic motivator (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) and is strongly conducive to work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), thus leading to Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 1: Performance feedback, as a key job resource, will be positively related to work engagement.

### ***Personal resources as antecedents of work engagement***

Personal resources comprise the second category of resources considered to be antecedents of work engagement within the JD-R model. Personal resources are defined as characteristics of the self that are associated with resilience and with a person's perceived ability to negotiate his/her environment successfully (Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003). Similar to job

resources, personal resources help workers to achieve goals, meet job demands without excessive physiological and psychological costs, and stimulate personal growth and development (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007, 2009a; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009b). Further, personal resources increase self-esteem, and they act as intrinsic motivators of goal achievement and work engagement (Bakker, 2011). According to Quick and Gavin (2001), together with Patel and Cunningham (2012), resources derived from religious faith or spirituality are interpretable as personal resources using the above-mentioned definition. Following the broad definition of above-mentioned personal resources, spiritual resources are here defined as a category of personal resources derived from an interaction with the sacred. They comprise personal beliefs, practices, and experiences that are related to the sacred and enhance a person's resilience and perceived ability to control and impact his/her environment successfully.

### *Spiritual resources as a category of personal resources*

In studies of occupational well-being among church leaders spirituality is a relevant, but often neglected, focus of the study (for some exceptions see Doolittle, 2007; Ellison, Roalson, Guillory, Flannelly, & Marcum, 2010; Miner & Dowson et al., 2010). Since the context and over-arching goal of church-based work is spiritual, it is likely that psycho-spiritual states would act as personal resources: intrinsic motivators of goal-directed behaviour and engagement in spiritual work. Definitions of spiritual and spirituality are contested (e.g., Helminiak, 2008) and vary between and within disciplines (e.g., Grant, O'Neil, & Stephens, 2004; Marques, Dhiman, & King, 2005), but within the psychology of religion and spirituality an influential definition of spirituality refers to a personal search for meaning, unity, connectedness, transcendence, and "the highest of human potential" (Pargament, 1999, p. 6). Hence, beliefs, attitudes, goals, and behaviours that relate to meaning, unity, and connectedness and have a particular reference to the sacred/transcendent comprise psycho-spiritual states that can function as personal resources.

There is some evidence that a sense of meaningfulness, and unity or connectedness with a source of divine control, is related to work engagement. First, when work itself is seen as serving God or fulfilling divine purposes, work-related strivings take on new significance and meaning, thereby resulting in larger investments of time and energy, and a greater likelihood of success (Paloutzian, Emmons, & Keortge, 2010). Meaningfulness of work tasks has been associated with work engagement and positive organisational outcomes (Hirschi, 2012; Rothmann & Buys, 2011). Second, religious/spiritual people report higher levels of perceived control than less religious peers (Fiori, Brown, Cortina, & Antonucci, 2006; Pargament, 1997). Such increased perceived control is attributed to a sharing in the control exercised by an all-powerful God with whom they are affiliated (Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009). Numerous measures of subjective well-being have been positively related to a variety of dimensions of spirituality through the mechanism of increased perceived control (Jackson & Bergeman, 2011). In these ways, through mechanisms of meaning and perceived control, and in parallel with other personal resources, spiritual resources would assist in achieving work goals, buffering work-related demands, and promoting personal development.

These considerations, then, are consistent with the following definition of spiritual resources: *Spiritual resources* are a category of personal resources derived from perceived interaction with the sacred/divine. The difference between personal resources and spiritual resources lies in the perceived sources of control and resistance to stress, with self as the referent in personal resources (e.g., self-efficacy, self-goal concordance, etc.) and the sacred as the chief referent in spiritual resources (Meek et al., 2003; Oman & Thoresen, 2005). Spiritual resources are thus distinguished from the multidimensional construct of spirituality (see Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005) in that they comprise only dimensions related to the sacred that function as personal resources as

defined by Hobfoll et al. (2003). As per the JD-R model, spiritual resources (as a category of personal resources) function to enhance a person's resilience and perceived ability to control and impact his/her environment successfully. Further, spiritual resources are expected to motivate actions to achieve work-related goals and to foster work engagement among church leaders. In this paper, two spiritual resources are investigated: a sense of spiritual relatedness and a perceived divine calling to spiritually focused work. These dimensions of spiritual resources were chosen because previous studies have identified them as related to both stress resilience and occupational well-being among religious workers (e.g., Ellison et al., 2010; Kaldor & Bullpitt, 2001; Meek et al., 2003).

### *Spiritual relatedness and work engagement*

A sense of spiritual relatedness is an experience of connection with the sacred/transcendent. Experiences of connection with the sacred are variously articulated within different religious traditions as a sense of closeness to God, union with the sacred, communion through prayer or meditation or sacrament, having a personal relationship with God, etc. Within much of the Christian tradition, satisfaction in one's perceived relationship with God is a psycho-spiritual state necessary for negotiating the environment of church ministry successfully, largely because part of the work of a church leader is to model and attempt to foster this relationship among congregational members. Spiritual relatedness is negatively associated with burnout among church leaders (Miner & Dowson et al., 2010; Miner & Sterland et al., 2009) and positively associated with satisfaction in ministry (Miner & Dowson et al., 2010). In a more direct test of spiritual relatedness as a resource, a sense of spiritual relatedness (indicated by reports of secure intimacy with God) was positively and significantly correlated with all dimensions of work engagement in a recent large-scale longitudinal study (Bickerton, 2013).

### *Sense of calling and work engagement*

The second spiritual resource investigated in this paper is the presence of a sense of divine calling to the work of church ministry. Although "calling" can refer in the secular literature to the pursuit of a meaningful, fulfilling, and socially useful career (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011), in religious contexts it refers to a sense of divine or sacred summons to one's work (Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010), experienced personally and/or mediated through a religious community. Calling is expected to motivate vigorous and dedicated action towards work goals in a spiritual context because it bolsters self-esteem and purpose via divine endorsement of the leader (Hirschi, 2012), and provides transcendent sources of meaning in work tasks (Paloutzian et al., 2010). Empirical studies of clergy suggest that the presence of a sense of divine calling is associated with such positive outcomes as lower depression (Knox, Virginia, Thull, & Lombardo, 2005), sustained effort (Kaldor & Bullpitt, 2001), and resilience (McKenna, Boyd, & Yost, 2007; Meek et al., 2003). More specifically, a sense of calling has also been shown to be positively and significantly correlated with each of the dimensions of work engagement (Bickerton, 2013). Despite variations in definitions of calling and spiritual relatedness, these proposed spiritual resources have consistently been associated with well-being at work (in addition see Dik, Duffy, & Eldridge, 2009; Hirschi, 2011, 2012; Meek et al., 2003).

The said theoretical and empirical considerations lead to the following hypothesis concerning a sense of relatedness to God and calling as spiritual resources:

Hypothesis 2: Spiritual relatedness and calling, as spiritual resources, will be positively related to work engagement.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 are represented in the research model displayed in Figure 1.

### ***Job demands and the motivational process of the JD-R model***

Job demands are also important determinants of well-being within the JD-R model. Job demands are defined as “physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312). Examples of job demands include high workload, a poor physical environment, “difficult” clients or colleagues, and cumbersome administrative procedures. Following Hill, Darling, and Raimondi (2003), this study included work–home interference (the perception that the demands of work interfere with responsibilities at home) as a job demand of particular significance for clergy.

Job demands affect the motivational process of the JD-R model by moderating the relationship between resources and work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). The JD-R model proposes that resources particularly promote work engagement when job demands are high (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). This proposition follows the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002), that resources are increasingly important in circumstances of high demands/threats. Further, people strive to protect material, psycho-social, and energy-related resources when these resources are likely to be lost. In the work context, high job demands are a threat to personal/social/energy resources and so are expected to elicit greater use of personal and job resources in order to prevent actual loss (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). For example, a study of teachers found that job resources (e.g., supervisor support, favourable work climate) increased work engagement particularly when job demands (pupil misconduct) were high (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti, & Xanthopoulou, 2007). These findings suggest the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Work–home interference, as a job demand, will moderate (amplify) the relationship between job and spiritual resources and work engagement. That is, as job demands increase the strength of the positive association between resources and work engagement will also increase.

### ***Leadership role***

Although the JD-R model proposes that relationships between job demands, job resources, and work engagement will hold across occupational groups (Bakker, 2011), empirical studies

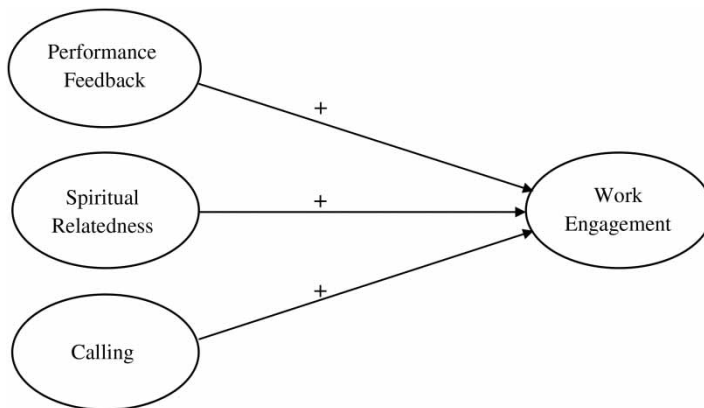


Figure 1. Research model illustrating Hypotheses 1 and 2.  
Note: + indicates a positive relationship.

indicate some differences between occupations, and between fixed-term and permanent employees within the same occupation (Hakanen & Roodt, 2010). Among religious workers, full-time and part-time positions imply varying occupational demands. Those with greater responsibility are typically accredited church ministers/clergy with sole or shared oversight of a congregation or parish. Lay ministers who work as part of a team under accredited senior ministers, itinerant ministers, and those who act in an advisory role generally have a lesser responsibility. In addition, clergy spend more hours each week engaged in spiritual leadership work and complete more theological studies than lay leaders (Kaldor & Bullpitt, 2001). For these reasons, ordained church leaders are expected to use spirituality more as a source of beliefs, attitudes, goals, and behaviours than lay leaders (Pargament, 1997). This increased importance of spiritual resources has been empirically demonstrated in a study of the efficacy of religious coping of clergy in comparison with lay church leaders and people who participate in the general congregation (Pargament, Tarakeshwar, Ellison, & Wulff, 2001). Therefore, a final hypothesis was constructed as follows:

Hypothesis 4: The strength of the relationships between job and spiritual resources and work engagement for clergy will be significantly greater than that for lay leaders.

## Method

### *Participants and procedure*

Participants were 1289 Australian church leaders (709 clergy and 580 lay leaders) from Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Pentecostal churches who completed a national survey to support the development of effective and sustainable leadership in churches. The mean age was 52.8 (SD = 13.6), with a range of 18–89 years. Just under two-thirds of the sample were male (65.7%), 81.8% were married, and 69.1% had completed formal theological training. Clergy worked a mean of 44.2 hours (SD = 16.9) per week in their church leadership role, which was significantly different from lay leaders ( $M = 9.81$ ,  $SD = 9.8$ ;  $t[1228] = 40.93$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Further, more clergy reported having completed tertiary theological training (88.9%) in comparison with lay leaders (25.5%;  $\chi^2[2] = 597.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

The items included in the analysis formed part of a 381-item survey administered to church leaders within the 2011 Australian National Church Life Survey's Leader Survey. Participants were not identified in this survey, and participation in the study was voluntary.

### *Measures*

All measures included in this study were previously validated scales except work–home interference and performance feedback. The reliability and validity of the item sets (scales) among this sample were assessed by Cronbach's alpha and a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .70 and above generally indicate the acceptable reliability of scales, although very short scales often show lower reliability coefficients (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

All resources and job demands items were scored on a five-point scale (1 = "Strongly disagree", 5 = "Strongly agree"). Two spiritual resources were included in the present study. *Spiritual relatedness* was measured with three items (e.g., "The quality of my spiritual practice has improved over my time in ministry") taken from the Spiritual Relatedness dimension of the Internal Orientation to the Demands of Ministry Survey (Miner & Dowson et al., 2010). These items yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .68. *Calling* was measured by one item ("I have a strong sense of call to my role here").

The job resource, *Performance feedback*, was measured by three items reflecting established processes and methods for monitoring and reviewing leaders and goals. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for these items (e.g., "This church has a clear process for reviewing pastoral staff [including senior clergy]") was .77.

The job demand, *Work-home interference*, was measured by three items concerned with the intrusion of work into other areas of the church leader's life (e.g., "I find it hard to keep my work life separate from other areas of life such as my home life"). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for these three items was .70.

*Work engagement* was measured by the nine-item version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006). The scale reflects three underlying dimensions, each measured with three items: vigour (e.g., "At my job, I feel strong and vigorous"); dedication (e.g., "My job inspires me"); and absorption (e.g., "I feel happy when I am working intensely"). Cronbach's alpha coefficients in this study were .70 for vigour, .79 for dedication, and .68 for absorption. All work engagement items were scored on a seven-point frequency scale from 1 ("Never") to 7 ("Always/Every day").

### Statistical analyses

CFA and structural equation modelling techniques were employed to test all three hypotheses using the responses to the 19 items specified earlier. Structural equation modelling is a robust analytic strategy for simultaneously modelling multiple direct and indirect effects, providing information on the overall fit of competing models, and estimating structural parameters after controlling for measurement error at the item level (Schumacker & Lomax, 2010).<sup>1</sup>

Scale items were treated as observed indicators of their respective first-order latent factors. Calling was represented by a single item, but the remaining 18 items were examined by CFA to assess how well these items measured six underlying factors (spiritual relatedness, performance feedback, work-home interference, vigour, dedication, and absorption). A subsequent higher order analysis was conducted using a work engagement factor that was operationalised by vigour, dedication, and absorption.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were assessed by examining how well the models fitted the data, and the significance and direction of estimated relationships between constructs. The hypothesised moderation effect would be demonstrated if the path coefficient from an interaction between a job demand and a resource to an outcome variable (such as work engagement) is statistically significant in the presence of all other variables (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

In order to test Hypothesis 4, a multi-group analysis was conducted to assess differences in the relationships of interest between clergy and lay leaders. With respect to this multi-group analysis, a configural model was first estimated in which all parameters were freely estimated in both groups. Second, the multi-group model was re-estimated with the parameters between independent (spiritual relatedness, calling, and performance feedback) and dependent (work engagement) variables constrained to be equal. If the difference between the fit of the two models is not significant, it can be concluded that relationships between constructs are invariant across the two groups (Byrne, 2012).

## Results

### Descriptive statistics

Means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations are presented in Table 1. All significant relationships between the main variables were in the expected direction and consistent with previous research (Bickerton, 2013). Notably, all correlations between the spiritual resources and

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, inter-correlations, and CFA factor loadings for the study variables.

Variable	Mean	SD	Range	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Spiritual relatedness	3.53	.68	1–5	<i>.66</i>						
2. Calling	4.04	.78	1–5	<i>.31***</i>						
3. Performance feedback	3.07	.81	1–5	<i>.23***</i>	<i>.06</i>					
4. Vigour	3.16	1.76	1–7	<i>.43***</i>	<i>.34***</i>	<i>.15***</i>				
5. Dedication	3.84	2.06	1–7	<i>.38***</i>	<i>.41***</i>	<i>.19***</i>	<i>.90***</i>			
6. Absorption	3.32	1.18	1–7	<i>.25***</i>	<i>.34***</i>	<i>.11**</i>	<i>.74***</i>	<i>.79***</i>		
7. Work–home interference	2.61	.72	1–5	<i>–.48***</i>	<i>–.17***</i>	<i>–.23***</i>	<i>–.37***</i>	<i>–.35***</i>	<i>–.16***</i>	

Note:  $N = 1230$ . Average factor loadings of scale items on their first-order factors are shown in italics on the diagonal.

\* $p < .05$ .

\*\* $p < .01$ .

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

work engagement first-order factors were positive and significant ( $r_{\text{range}} = .25$  to  $.43$ ), as was the correlation between performance feedback (a job resource) and vigour, dedication, and absorption ( $r_{\text{range}} = .11$  to  $.15$ ). Further, work–home interference was negatively correlated with all other constructs ( $r_{\text{range}} = -.16$  to  $-.48$ ).

### Measurement models

The 18 item, six first-order factor CFA yielded an acceptable fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 466.77$ ;  $df = 132$ ; CFI = .95; TLI = .93; RMSEA = .05) and suggested good construct validity, that is, all indicator items displayed moderate to high factor loadings on the factor they were designed to measure (see Table 1). The hypothesised higher order measurement model also yielded an acceptable fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 409.79$ ;  $df = 126$ ; CFI = .95; TLI = .93; RMSEA = .05), and was superior in comparison with an alternative model additionally representing spiritual relatedness, calling, and performance feedback as a “general resources” higher order factor ( $\Delta\chi^2(19) = 156.75$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

### Structural models

In order to test the three hypotheses, a series of structural models was estimated. As can be seen in Table 2, all structural models met model-fit criterion values.

Table 2. Results of structural equation modelling (maximum likelihood estimator).

Model description	$\chi^2$	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	Model comparison $\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df)$	$p$
Research model	378.57	96	.95	.94	.05		
<i>Invariance testing for group differences:</i>							
Configural	490.29	192	.95	.94	.05		
Parameters invariant between study variables	492.50	195	.95	.94	.05	2.21(2)	<i>ns</i>

Note:  $N = 1287$ .

$\chi^2$ , Chi-square goodness of fit statistic;  $df$ , degrees of freedom; TLI, Tucker–Lewis Index; CFI, Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA, root means square error of approximation.

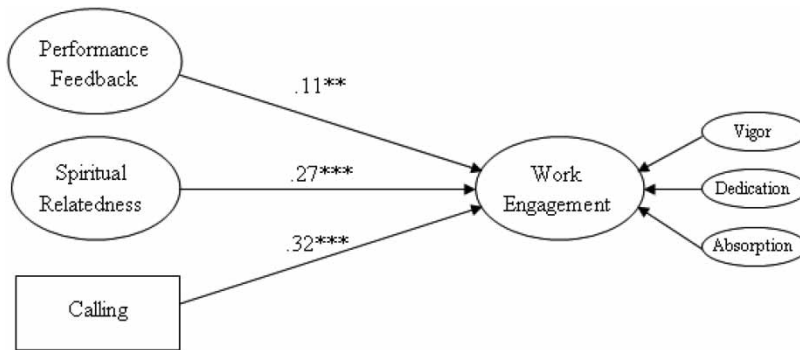


Figure 2. Research model with standardised parameter estimates. For figure parsimony, items and first-order factor loadings are not shown but are available upon request from the authors. Note:  $N = 1230$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

#### *Overall model fit and parameters estimated (Hypotheses 1 and 2)*

The structural model representing the research model (see Figure 1) yielded an acceptable fit to the data as shown in Table 2. All structural relationships between the study variables were interpretable in line with Hypotheses 1 and 2. Supporting Hypothesis 1, performance feedback was positively related to work engagement ( $\gamma = .11$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Supporting Hypothesis 2, both spiritual relatedness and calling were positively related to work engagement ( $\gamma = .27$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and  $\gamma = .32$ ;  $p < .001$ , respectively). This model is shown in Figure 2.

#### *Testing for moderation effects (Hypothesis 3)*

In order to test whether work-home interference amplified (i.e., positively moderated) the three direct effects of performance feedback, spiritual relatedness, and calling on work engagement (Hypothesis 3), the research model was re-estimated with the inclusion of three interaction terms (the interaction between work-home interference and performance feedback; the interaction between work-home interference and spiritual relatedness; and the interaction between work-home interference and calling) additionally loading on work engagement. The unstandardised path coefficients indicated that work-home interference *negatively* moderated the relationships between both spiritual relatedness and work engagement ( $\gamma = -.97$ ;  $SE = .29$ ;  $p = .001$ ) and calling and work engagement ( $\gamma = -.18$ ;  $SE = .05$ ;  $p < .001$ ), but did not significantly moderate the relationship between performance feedback and work engagement ( $\gamma = -.14$ ;  $SE = .17$ ;  $ns$ ). That is, not only was there no evidence to support the hypothesis (H3) that the job demand of work-home interference would increase the strength of the relationship between resources and work engagement, but also the results suggest that the positive relationships between both spiritual relatedness and work engagement and calling and work engagement are attenuated rather than amplified by the presence of work-home interference.

#### *Testing for group differences in associations between spiritual resources and work engagement (Hypothesis 4)*

To test for any differences in how the study variables relate to one another on the basis of ministry role (i.e., clergy or lay leader), the fit of the configural model was compared with that of a model that constrained the three structural relationships between study variables to be equal across both groups. Table 2 shows that the resultant change in model fit was not significant. Therefore, the

hypothesised relationships of job and spiritual resources with work engagement were deemed not significantly different for clergy in comparison with lay leaders.

## Discussion

The present study was a test of the motivational processes specified by the JD-R model as applied to religious workers. Of particular interest was the role of spiritual resources as direct antecedents of work engagement in the presence of job resources (performance feedback) and job demands (work–home interference). Further, the effects of leadership role category (i.e., clergy versus lay leader) were examined.

### *Job resources and work engagement*

As predicted by Hypothesis 1, the job resource of performance feedback was positively associated with work engagement. This finding is consistent with data from other occupational groups (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and supports the motivational role of job-related feedback among church leaders. Performance appraisals that are specific and constructive can function to increase work engagement by signalling social support, improving communication with supervisors, and indicating the direction for future efforts (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Hence, the present findings suggest that church organisations should provide appropriate performance feedback as a means of increasing work engagement of church leaders.

### *Spiritual resources and work engagement*

Hypothesis 2, that spiritual resources would be positively associated with work engagement, was also supported. This finding strengthens arguments for the inclusion of spiritual resources as a category of personal resources for those involved in religious work. Previously, personal resources were largely assessed through measures of optimism, self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). Such resources were found to be positively associated with work engagement because, it was proposed, they increase self-regard and concordance within the self around goals, hence enhancing intrinsic motivation and work engagement (Bakker, 2011). Theoretically, spiritual resources such as a sense of spiritual relatedness and divine calling can increase self-regard (by fostering cognitions that one is handling spiritual “goods” with integrity) and integrate the self around the spiritual goals of work (providing a core sense of legitimacy as a spiritual/religious leader) (Miner & Sterland et al., 2009). The present findings demonstrate the function of spiritual resources as a category of personal resources. Hence, the inclusion of spiritual resources within the JD-R model for religious occupational cohorts such as church leaders is further justified.

The relative strength of spiritual and job resources among church leaders is also noteworthy. In most secular occupations, job resources are more strongly associated with work engagement than personal resources (e.g., Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). However, in the present study the relationship between spiritual resources and work engagement was three times the magnitude of the relationship between the job resource of performance feedback and work engagement. This finding is similar to that of Hakanen and Lindbohm (2008) who found the personal resource of optimism to be more strongly associated with work engagement than job resources among female breast cancer survivors. Thus, among certain specific samples and occupations, particular personal resources may be just as important, if not more so, than job resources. This cross-sectional finding is also consistent with recent longitudinal research identifying spiritual resources as the most significant predictor of work engagement among clergy and other religious

workers (Bickerton, 2013). Hence, we recommend that church organisations seeking to increase work engagement among religious workers should consider ways to enhance their spiritual resources.

### ***Job demands, resources, and work engagement***

Hypothesis 3, work–home interference would moderate (amplify) the relationship between job and spiritual resources and work engagement, was not supported. There was no significant moderation effect on the relationship between performance feedback (a job resource) and work engagement. Further, the results indicate that work–home interference *attenuates* the relationship between spiritual resources and work engagement: as work–home interference increased, the positive relationship between spiritual resources and work engagement decreased. These findings were unexpected given the premise that resources acquire greater motivational salience in the presence of threats (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002).

There are three possible explanations for this last finding: theoretical, methodological, and situational. These three explanations are outlined in the following.

A theoretical explanation for this finding is that work–home interference may be best conceptualised not as a job demand for clergy as in previous research (Hill et al., 2003), but rather as a consequence of other job demands. Work–home interference could function as a further stressor when other job demands, such as high workload, conflict with family responsibilities and personal recreation. If work–home interference is a stressor that follows other stressors such as high workload and not a job demand, models including work–home interference as a job demand would not show increases in the strength of relationships between resources and work engagement as expected from Hobfoll’s resource theory.

A second, methodological, explanation for the failure to find the positive moderation, expected, is that the selected job demand was not domain-matched with the resources and outcome measure. According to de Jonge and Dormann (2006), a moderator is most likely to have a significant influence on the relationship between a predictor and outcome if they are of the same type (i.e., cognitive, emotional, or physical). When applied to church leaders, this domain-matching hypothesis would suggest that a spiritual resource (e.g., calling) and a spiritual outcome (such as engagement in spiritual work tasks) would be most likely moderated by a spiritual demand (such as high levels of spiritual work to be accomplished).

A final situational explanation, also consistent with resource theory, is that the threat to home life indicated by high work–home interference stimulates the church leader to invest resources in family relationships rather than in work-focused spiritual goals (Hobfoll, 2011). High levels of spiritual resources, then, might be directed to carrying out the “calling” to be an effective spouse or parent (or other family-situated role), and the church leader would consequently demonstrate less vigour, dedication, and absorption in the work situation. In other words, high levels of work–home interference might motivate the investment of spiritual resources in the home rather than the workplace, thus attenuating the relationship between spiritual resources and work engagement. A test of Hobfoll’s (1989, 2002) resource theory in this context would require measurement of family-related investments of energy and associated outputs, such as marital involvement and subsequent marital satisfaction, in order to ascertain whether spiritual resources are actually invested in alternative, family-related relationships.

### ***Effects of clergy status within the JD-R model***

It was expected that relationships between spiritual resources, job resources, and work engagement would be greater for clergy than lay leaders. Although clergy were found to spend more

time in their role of church leader and received more theological training than lay leaders, hypothesised differences in the strength of relationships between resources and work engagement were not supported. Of particular interest is the finding that a sense of calling to a ministry role was significantly and moderately strongly associated with work engagement across both groups despite clergy having some external validation of their calling in their ordination. The present results suggest that it is the spiritual nature of the work itself, rather than external matters such as theological training, ordination, or level of authority, that orients church leaders towards the use of spiritual resources required to maintain work engagement.

### ***Strengths, limitations, and future studies***

A major strength of this study was the inclusion of spiritual resources, as a category of personal resources, within the JD-R model applied to church leaders. There has been relatively little investigation of work engagement among church leaders, and even less investigation of spiritual resources within this model. Hence, this study emphasises the salience of spiritual resources for work engagement. Further, the testing of moderation effects using work-home interference as a specific job demand suggests that relationships between spiritual resources, job demands, and work engagement are complex. Future studies could test: (1) whether work-home interference is an unambiguous job demand and (2) domain-match unambiguous demands that theoretically are of the same type as the specific resources and outcome variables being measured.

The study has several limitations. First, all measures were derived from self-reports and hence, there is concern regarding common method bias. Future studies of work engagement among church leaders would be improved if some objective measures of work demands and resources were included (such as direct observations of conditions or behavioural indicators of job or personal resources). Second, the study used archival data that were not collected specifically for the purposes of this research with the result that a relatively limited set of indicators of resources and demands consistent with the proposed model were available for analysis. Further, archival data resulted in relatively short scales with restricted reliability. Future work using overlapping sets of indicators (some similar to, some different from, those used in the present study) would provide useful validation of the current findings. Third, the study was cross-sectional in design and conducted in one country: it could not assess causal influences over time or cross-culturally. In particular, inferences concerning the direction of relationships between spiritual resources and work engagement require longitudinal studies of multiple cultural groups in order to establish causal sequences.

### **Conclusion**

This study investigated motivational processes affecting the work engagement of church leaders using a modification of the JD-R model in which spiritual resources were included as a category of personal resources. Findings supported the modified model's applicability to church leaders, but suggested that the proposed buffering role of job demands may be more complex than previously considered. In addition, the findings indicated that the strength of relationships between job and spiritual resources and work engagement is of a similar magnitude for both ordained clergy and lay leaders. The study provides some support to initiatives that promote spiritual resources, such as spiritual retreats and other means of enhancing a sense of connectedness with God among church leaders. For these reasons, we suggest that the study adds usefully to the small but growing research literature on work engagement among church leaders.

## Note

1. Goodness-of-fit for the models in this study was assessed using the chi-square goodness of fit statistic ( $\chi^2$ ), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) as produced by the Mplus programme employing the maximum likelihood estimator (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2010). Values of RMSEA less than .05 are generally taken to represent good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999), and CFI and TLI values greater than .90 indicate an acceptable model fit (Marsh, Hau, & Grayson, 2005).

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